



Aerial view of “Wonder,” 2012. Landscape design by Balmori Associates, 7-acre lot.

architects, as well as his team, has reimagined two privately owned vacant lots lent by real estate developers. A third site will be unveiled later this year. Perhaps the most incredible part of these projects is that they are not permanent: they will survive as long as the empty lots remain empty; once developers are ready to build, the installations will disappear. “Wonder” (2012), the first—and largest—of Fung’s art parks in the vicinity of the boardwalk, has radically redeveloped the seven-acre site of the former Sands Casino Hotel, which was sold and demolished in 2007 to make room for a never-realized \$1.5 billion “mega-casino.” (In November 2013, the site was sold again, so the days of “Wonder” may be limited.) ACA’s idea to install eye-catching marvels is in keeping with the site’s glitzy past—and, most likely, its future. On the other hand, local residents, whose opinions Fung sought at special mixer events, simply desired a “clean, safe, quiet, enclosed space.” While the project’s funding allocation is for public art, Fung’s goal is to provide useful and beautiful common areas that serve the community. Distinguishing between an outdoor art exhibition and Artlantic, he notes, “We’re creating much-needed public space that is aesthetic.” The resulting park—a fusion of earthwork, outdoor gallery, and public sculpture—contains and holds in tension the high aspirations and inevitable compromises typical of multi-partner, public art ventures.

Visitors approach “Wonder” from the beach via a winding path made from crushed white seashells and rose-brown pebbles, passing through sandy scrubland, dune grass, and rows of dusty, young evergreens. An undulating, terraced earthwork curves through the lot in a sweeping figure eight, or infinity sign as Fung sees it. Its 14-foot-high turf walls screen the park interior from nearby gaming areas, while gently recalling the drama and motion of an Atlantic City rollercoaster. Makeshift post-and-tape fences trace a route around and eventually inside the spaces encircled by the mounds. From almost any point within the earthwork, it is as if the near-emptiness expands to erase busy streets and silence the visual noise of surrounding buildings. Conceived by Fung and realized by landscape architects Balmori Associates, this sculpted environment is also an effective placemaker for the three primary artistic interventions featured in “Wonder”—works by Robert Barry, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, and Kiki Smith. One grassy ridge encloses a contemplative sculpture by Smith; its twin, at the park’s other end (furthest from the ocean front), contains the Kabakovs’ large-scale contribution to Artlantic. Barry’s untitled, colored channel letters (2012) weave haphazardly along the terraces, as if washed up by a storm. Illuminated daily from dusk until dawn, each configuration projects a word—“believe,” “look,” “inspire”—that both describes and nurtures the calm, inquiring states of mind that “Wonder” seeks to engender. Ilya and Emilia Kabakov’s partially submerged pirate ship

LAWMAN LEE, COURTESY FUNG COLLABORATIVES

Artlantic: Wonder in Atlantic City

by Becky Huff Hunter

Now entering the third year of a planned five-year run in Atlantic City, Artlantic is a high-profile, \$10 million public art program that must support the weight of great—and divergent—stakeholder expectations. Above all, the project is integral to the tourism district’s Master Plan for urban regeneration. Initiated to “revitalize and rebuild Atlantic City’s reputation” by the nonprofit Atlantic City Alliance (ACA), a marketing body funded and overseen by the area’s casinos, Artlantic

must drive tourism by creating “a new generation of Atlantic City spectacles” through interactive installations that reconfirm the resort as an entertainment destination.* Rising to the challenge is independent curator Lance Fung of Fung Collaboratives, who has his own ambitious aims: to make “high” art accessible to mainstream audiences while changing art world perceptions about practice in the public domain. So far, Fung, in collaboration with artists and landscape



Top: installation view with (foreground) Robery Barry, *Untitled*, 2012. Metal and acrylic channel letters, 24 x 4 x 78–174 in. Above: Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *Devil’s Rage*, 2012. Wood, gold-painted coins, plaster, and sand, 71 x 25 x 15 ft. Below: Kiki Smith, *Her*, 2012. Bronze, 70 x 36 x 18 in. Work installed in the Red Garden, designed with Balmori Associates.



LAWMAN LEE, COURTESY FUNG COLLABORATIVES

Devil’s Rage (2012), complete with flag pole and watch tower, is the most ambitious and striking Artlantic work to date. Sadly, however, it is also a case study in compromise. Conceived as an adventurous space in which to play, climb, and revel in Atlantic City mythology, up close the hefty sculpture feels sanitary, its imaginative vision constrained by health and safety regulations. With plastic screens that bar visitor access to its upper deck and not a nut, screw, or lick of varnish out of place, the ship confounds the desire to clamber and explore. A rather intrusive metal platform bedecked with marketing banners connects to the ship’s prow. In the summer and early fall of 2013, this platform hosted activities for locals and tourists (mostly fitness classes, judging from the published event schedule). Accompanied by loud pumping music and cheery class instruction, such strenuous activity was at odds with the eerily refreshing stillness of the park as a whole. Despite these inevitable compromises, Fung’s best intentions for Artlantic come alive through “Wonder.” Smith’s half of the grassy earthwork consists of a carefully color-scaped garden arranged in four seasonal planting zones designed to burst with shades of red throughout the year. The lush, organic elements, with their sensuous tactile appeal (leaves, bark, berries, flowers), contrast with the Kabakovs’ varnished wood and cool sand, providing relief from Atlantic City’s gaudy decor. In keeping with Fung’s focus on landscape as a shaper of experience, Smith designed an environment in which she would want to spend time. *Her*, the centrally installed bronze statue



Left: Robert Lach, *Refuge Nest Colony* (detail), 2013. 7 molded resin nests, 12 x 40 x 40 in. Below: Jedediah Morfit, *Flood Suite*, *Love Seat* and *Chair #1*, 2013. Aluminum, 42 x 19 x 35.5 and 16.5 x 16.5 x 34.75 in.

depicting a peaceful woman holding a deer, was lent from the artist's own garden. The delicate linearity of the figure's inscribed hair, eyebrows, and wrinkles reinforces, in microcosm, the quiet, tactile precision of the park as a whole.

Two low-key groups of works installed more recently by emerging, local artists Jedediah Morfit and Robert Lach seem to have been made with Atlantic City residents in mind, demonstrating Fung's conviction that "art can have healing and holistic properties for a community." These works provide

peaceful resting places, thoughtfully capture the city's brokenness, and resonate with Artlantic's hopefulness for renewal. Lach's *Refuge Nest Colony* (2013) is a scattering of low-lying, primary-colored sculptures designed as seating. Each cubby-style seat was constructed from washed-up debris cast in fiberglass. Spread too far apart to function as a unit—for instance, as a spot for group relaxation—the sculptures create safe havens for individual contemplation, while their shape, title, and proximity to *Devil's Rage* suggest a meta-

phor of lifebuoys poised to rescue those in need. The placement of Morfit's *The Flood Suite* (2013) is equally intriguing. The ornate, brushed aluminum benches, chairs, and gate incorporate intertwined motifs taken from the ocean—gulls and broken boats—and from everyday boardwalk and city life—sneakers, telegraph poles, and crushed detritus. The chairs, placed close to the park's entrance, face directly into one of the landscaped terraces, which means that almost the entire landscape and its interior artworks are blocked from view—only two of Barry's words and a few plants are visible. By positioning Morfit's seating away from a conventionally "good view," Fung resists ACA's carnivalesque goals and instead encourages quiet conversation.

The second Artlantic art park *Étude Atlantis* (2012), located right on the boardwalk, launched with a dazzling, photogenic performance by the Atlantic City Ballet that featured in many media reports. Now, sandwiched between two boardwalk bars and—at a year old—looking badly scuffed, environmental artist John Roloff's boldly patterned space appears at home in its frayed, yet flashy surroundings. Competing pop beats from nearby establishments converge, syncopated, on the outdoor installation, casting it as a (probably beer-sticky) dance floor, its black, gray, and white spiraling painted stripes the ghosts of long-gone disco lights. Thanks to its stark, graphic quality, the piece still looks stunning in photographs, if not in the flesh. Media images from the opening celebration, which honored Hurricane Sandy first responders, must have compelled tourists to visit the site. And it is indeed through photography that many visitors have found a personal use for *Étude Atlantis*.

TOP: LAYMAN LEE, COURTESY FUNG COLLABORATIVES / BOTTOM: COURTESY THE ARTIST



LAYMAN LEE, COURTESY FUNG COLLABORATIVES



Above: John Roloff, *Étude Atlantis*, 2012. Painted asphalt, painted plywood, stainless steel, cistern, water, and lighting, 8500 sq. ft. Right: Peter Hutchinson, *Artlantic Triple Thrown Rope*, 2013. Boulders and plantings, 2 views of installation.

During the hour that I took advantage of the installation's clean benches, complimentary Wi-Fi, and freshly misted arbor, numerous couples, families, and friends posed enthusiastically in front of this perfect backdrop. Using the creative tools at hand—smartphones equipped with Instagram-type apps, for instance—visitors designed their own "spectaculars." The work's compelling stripes meet at its centerpiece, a somewhat grimy, mirrored fountain—non-functioning when I visited—that creates a pool of light. Pennies, nickels, and dimes glinted at the bottom of the cistern, though a sign forbids this practice: "Don't throw coins in the fountain." It is in the spirit of Artlantic that tourists have found their preferred use for the space—as wishing well and photo studio, in defiance of its operating instructions.

Artlantic's success extends beyond the physical objects by commissioned artists. Instead, across both parks and expressed variously, Artlantic creates open spaces that work as alternatives to the mayhem of the boardwalk, the stress of outlet



shopping, and the wear and tear of a run-down urban environment. Conceptual land artist Peter Hutchinson's sculpture *Artlantic Triple Thrown Rope* (2013), located on the outskirts of "Wonder" is the newest addition. Hutchinson tosses rope ahead of him, then marks its

chance-based resting places and defines each spot with arrangements of boulders and plantings. Almost unnoticeable and changing with the seasons, his interventions are worth searching for. The most compelling aspects of "Wonder," like *Triple Thrown Rope*, are the least sen-

sational ones, the ones that gently articulate and expand precious breathing space for visitors and residents alike.

Note

* More information is available at <www.atlanticcityalliance.net/about-us/> and <www.atlanticcityalliance.net/programs/Artlantic/>.